

JULIAN GOULD
A radical volunteer

This short biography of Julian Gould was prepared as part of a presentation to school children for the centenary of the start of WWI. Julian was one of three young men who had some connection to Brentham and whose experience at the front is documented.

The other two were John Noppen, who lived in Brentham after the war and Jack Martin who lived in Ealing. His great-nephew lives in Brentham. They both left diaries.

Julian did not leave an account of his life at the front, but he sent home letters and drawings, and his father wrote about the war and his family's involvement in it.

Julian Gould had ambitions to be a painter. He had done well at Art School where he was also remembered as kind and considerate.

In 1910, after some time in a Paris studio, he returned to his family's modern home in the experimental community of Brentham. The house, ARMORAL is at the top of Woodfield Avenue at the junction with Woodfield Crescent. He earned his living as a printer's designer-- a graphic designer. He studied French, loved poetry and novels and often drew from nature. He enjoyed sketching in the neighbourhood of Lincoln Cathedral and, when there, a particular girl. His father described him as having "moods of careless unworldliness which made him resemble the poet in Greys "Elegy in Country Churchyard" a poem that he had learned by heart.

*Of course we seen him at the peep of dawn
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away
To meet the sun upon the upland lawn:*

*"There at the foot of yonder nodding beech,
that wreaths its old, fantastic roots so high,
His listless length at noontide he would stretch,
And pore upon the brook that babbles by"*

He sounds like the sort of young man that is called "a bit of a dreamer".

Julian Gould had an unusual background. His father, Frederick, was a philosopher and educationalist who had lost his Christian faith but believed that all religions could offer moral guidance. He had started his teaching career in the poorest part of the east end of London. He became a pioneer of Secular Humanism, helping to set up both the Rationalist Press Association and a Union of Ethical Societies, a forerunner of the British Humanist Association. He was a friend of George Holyoake and had, like him, been accused of atheism, although they both would be better described as agnostics. Atheism was still regarded by many as, at best scandalous, and possibly evil. George Holyoake was the last man in England to be imprisoned for atheism and invented the term "Jingoism". Frederick was involved in radical politics, aligning himself with Socialists, the Co-operative movement and other organizations. This was a family where the rights and wrongs of national life were analysed. They considered

themselves part of the international labour movement. At that time socialists and secularists were organising to change the institutions that controlled society, so were not likely to be easily persuaded by those in power or by noisy patriotism. From his work and letters we know that Julian loved his country but shared his father's critical views of the way it was governed. He often designed artwork for various radical groups and some of his drawings have subjects that are sympathetic to the Socialist cause. A drawing of noble and hopeful looking socialists, singing "England Arise" is not his best work, but displays his politics.

In August 1914 Frederick, his wife and Julian's young sister Romola attended the great anti-war demonstration in Trafalgar Square where placards read "The German workers are our brothers" and "We do not want to kill German working men" So why did Julian, a kind and idealistic artist, volunteer to fight in 1915, supported by his father, a man whose life was dedicated to the brotherhood of man and questioning conventional attitudes?

His father had read on newspaper stands, about a German U-boat sinking the Lusitania, a British liner. There were many babies and children among the 1198 people killed and the deliberate targeting of civilians was profoundly shocking for a world not yet used to warfare on this scale.

"When I reached home I found my son Julian sitting thoughtful in a room, where in view of garden and trees, he often designed and painted. He had that day volunteered for the Army. -----I believe millions of our young citizens joined the army with a spirit as free from Imperialism or militarism as his. Among my circle of acquaintance, the Non- resistance Minds and Conscientious Objector types were distinctly numerous. My judgement named them as less manly and less worthy. I say it with regret."

"During the war I had come to the conclusion that it was the moral duty of British citizens to support the cause of the Allies"

The Gould family, like many other liberal-minded people, eventually supported the war because they believed that pacifism could not contain the expansion of Germany. While they wished for more fairness in Britain and her Empire they could see that the militarism of Germany at that time offered even less choice to the working-man; they saw that the countries already occupied by Germany had less democracy. Over six thousand civilians, including women and children, had been killed in the early months of the occupation of Belgium. They believed that the cause was a noble one----The Defence of Freedom.

Julian completed his six months training and, in November, aged 24, left for France as a private in the 16th Middlesex Regiment. This was a "Pals Battalion" where friends were recruited who wished to serve together. There were groups from occupations, social clubs and villages. The 16th was the PUBLIC SCHOOLS BATTALION, made up of public school boys who would rather serve in the ranks with their friends than become an officer and men who were too old to be offered a commission. But, although well educated, Julian had not been to a Public School. He had attended a modest Grammar School. By 1916 so many officers had been lost that the army no longer encouraged Public schoolboys to serve in the ranks as they were needed to

replace the dead officers. Although still known as the Public Schools Battalion other recruits were now taken. However, it seems that the standard of education in the ranks of this battalion remained high. Possibly the name would put off some recruits and encouraged others who hoped for educated companions. However, as always in the British army, the more socially elevated the Battalion, the more likely they were to be trusted with an important attack.

His letters contain the same details of life experienced by all at the front --- cold, heat, hunger, thirst and unwashed bodies. Rats, mud, tiring marches and parades, dug-outs and, occasionally, a welcome rest, when billeted in a barn or drawing the French countryside. One day, while on duty in the trenches, he tells of gazing at a lark rising in the sky and being reminded of the training camp in England by the scent of may-blossom. He sends home drawings of his surroundings without titles, as they were not allowed to identify their position, but he says he feels better to know that he is not far from one of the most beautiful cathedrals in the world. This hint gets through the military censor, probably a junior officer in his battalion, who had to read all the men's letters. His family guess it may be Amiens. He draws portraits from photos of his comrade's sweethearts to be send home as gifts. He reads French novels and imagines the characters living in the villages they march through.

He tells his sister that one night in the trenches is made happier by reciting Grey's Elegy all the way through. They had visited the Churchyard that inspired the poem together. If his recital was heard by his companions many of them would have familiar with it as it was a standard text in school poetry books. Its opening line "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day" is still well known but many other lines in the poem are familiar as they are often quoted in other writing and films.

But Julian's letters change after the Battle of the Somme in 1916. This was the largest and bloodiest Battle of the war. 1,000,000 men died. In the Somme cemeteries there are long lines of graves naming the men of the Public Schools Battalion. You can find on-line a film of his Battalion who were supporting the leading attack. It is fuzzy and silent, but like a nightmare, as you watch some men run or walk and others fall across craters and ditches, under continual shelling. They advanced into withering machine-gun fire. Most were cut down or trapped in no man's land. After nightfall those that were pinned down were made into prisoners of war. It was at the Somme that the effect of one machine-gunner cutting through many men in one sweep was fully understood. The British army ordered more Machine-guns and trained more gunners.

Now his letters tell of sadness, his friend Henry was missing and Julian writes to his girlfriend encouraging her to hope for his return, but Henry is dead, and Julian probably knew that this was likely.

His father said that his letters were full of brooding thoughts, with intense revolt from the stupidity and inhumanness of it all. Over and over again he writes of his weariness of spirit. He also complains of headaches and fever although he was never ill enough to be put on a sick list.

"HOSPITAL WOULD BE A RELAXATION" "Dear Roma, I feel very far from well: it can't be helped however. Please send me some socks for I need them urgently.

But he is still has a painters eye. As he walks in the drizzling rain past a batch of German prisoners mending the road he notes:

“ their grey uniforms quite beautiful in colour” “The other day I saw a strange juxtaposition of ancient and modern. We were tramping through a narrow street. In a low doorway I saw four nuns in robes of blue, black and dazzling white. Down their fronts glistened rosaries of jet, ivory and gold. Sunken deep in their faces, their eyes contemplated the moving column of khaki—hot, loaded with equipment and rifles, it almost brushed their clothes in passing; a pageant of modern warfare glancing at a tableau of medieval religion ”

At the end of 1916 he had a day-off, wandering around Amiens Cathedral and in a New Year letter he adds the wish ***“that I could be assured of seeing Lincoln Cathedral again”*** Perhaps he was also thinking of the girl in Lincoln.

He dreams of a painting that he would like to attempt

“A great indistinct form of a man, with a golden glow around his head; in the background would be the world of energy---quarries ,cathedrals, engines, boats, books, woven patterns. The man’s hands would be stretched out, knotted and veined, full of the effort of work” The man’s, name is LABOUR; he is reaching forward to the splendid sunshine of REWARD, IDEAL and FUTURE.

This seems like the type of painting of Heroic Workers that later became associated with Communist regimes. Clearly his political sympathies are not altered. Perhaps they are now hardened by sight of so much suffering--- and what is happening elsewhere.

It is now 1917. The Russian revolution started in February. Julian must have been aware of it as the news papers were read in the trenches, although often weeks late. He would not have written of it in his letters as, at this time, any sympathy for the Russian revolutionaries would have been considered anti-patriotic as they were encouraging their own soldiers to mutiny.

He has a friendly argument about religion with a Methodist comrade and, in crowded canteen he reads “with great satisfaction” a pamphlet about a French Philosopher who was an influence on the communist founder, Karl Marx. He discusses economics and is more optimistic about the future than his comrade.

But, whatever he feels about its system, he loves his homeland. He ends the letter about his vision of that political painting with;

“Love to England”

In May 1917 batches of his comrades are sent home on leave and he longs to be with them but is sent on an errand to the town of Arras and misses his place in the train. A few days later his Regiment go over the top several times between three and four o’clock in the afternoon.

In June, in their house in Woodfield Road, Frederick and his wife open a letter from an Army chaplain.

“Dear Sir,

It grieves me very much to have to write this letter to you. I am writing personally to tell you that your son was killed in action on May 31st. It occurred when the

battalion was making a small attack near a village called Monchy-le-preux. Your son died nobly, doing his duty.

It is easy to think of a sensitive and creative person like Julian as passive and entirely a victim of aggression, but after his death his father found out that he was a Company Machine-Gunner, a position he had held for some time. He must have killed many of the enemy before he was killed by a shell. He had never told of his position as a Machine Gunner in his letters home. First hand accounts are valuable insights into what happens to individuals, but they do not tell everything; each man is his own censor.

After the war his father remained of the opinion that there was no choice but to fight in 1914, but he became very involved with promoting the League of Nations and work on World Peace, which, he believed, should be part of every child's education.

Julian recited Grey's Elegy through a long night in the trenches. A line from that poem was used as the title for a film that is still shocking in its depiction of how some soldiers were treated. It is "Paths of Glory" The painter C.R.W. Nevinson used the same line as the title for his depiction of dead soldiers that was censored by the Government in 1918.

*The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.*

Julian's name is on the Arras Memorial to soldiers whose grave is unknown.

Frederick published a Memorial Notice that gave an account of his son's life. A copy is in the Brentham Archives.

He also prepared an album of photographs, drawings and letters that is now owned by McMaster's University and is available on-line. Julian's fine self portrait can be seen on the web-site YOUR PAINTINGS as part of the UKs National Art Collection.

*Frederick wrote many books of moral and educational philosophy. His memoir **F.J.GOULD: Life Story of a Humanist** is a fascinating account of a particular period of political and social change from an influential man whose ideas are still being debated but whose name is now little known.*

He died in Ealing in 1938. Julian's sister Romola did not marry and remained in Ealing. She died in Mount Park Road in the mid 1960s. Her obituary is listed in the Archives of the ETHICAL SOCIETY. It seems she had continued the family interest in politics as one of her letters, in which she considers joining the Liberal Party, is held in the Archives of the Labour Party.